



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS
CITIZEN'S ETHICS ADVISORY BOARD

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

March 22, 2013

***Statement of Charles F. Chiusano, Chairman
Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board***

House Bill 6353 – AAC Concerning State Budget Reform

***House Bill 6354 – AA Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
Concerning General Government***

Good morning, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane and Representative Miner, and distinguished Committee members. For the record, I am Charles Chiusano, Chairman of the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board for the Office of State Ethics. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony concerning **House Bill 6353 and House Bill 6354**.

On behalf of the nine members of the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board I urge you to reject **House Bill 6354, section 131 to section 141**, which seeks to further consolidate the Office of State Ethics.

Dismantling and then combining government functions under one umbrella may provide negligible fiscal savings, however, it will likely produce poor results and harm the entire operation of the Office of State Ethics while further eroding public confidence in our elected officials and government.

In 2011, when consolidation of the three watchdog agencies was proposed, the legislature realized, despite the fiscal crisis it was in, that it was more important to protect the independence of the agencies and their ability to carry out their fundamental responsibilities. This legislative body must again choose to maintain an independent and adequately funded Office of State Ethics to ensure its distinction as a fair, impartial and effective watchdog.

Failure to maintain the current structure would impact individuals seeking non-partisan advice to ensure compliance. Certainly, an office that is required to report to any Governor would create vulnerability for staff that investigate and audit those in positions of power.

Watchdog agencies need to perform their functions impartially without fear of repercussion.

The Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board also urges the General Assembly to reject **House Bill 6353** which removes the budgetary independence of the three watchdog agencies: the Office of State Ethics, Freedom of Information Commission, and State Elections Enforcement Commission. This proposal would repeal General Statutes §1-81a, and would allow the Governor to reduce the Office of State Ethics' budget and ignore the agency's budget requests and substitute his own. Without this important budgetary protection the Office of State Ethics could face budget rescissions that further weaken its ability to accomplish its mission.

The General Assembly in 2004, 2009 and 2011 properly recognized that the independence and functions of the three watchdogs was far too important to subject them to political pressure from any single elected official.

The independent budget authority of the three watchdogs is not without appropriate oversight, it incorporates the same process for the Commissions' budget requests as is currently applicable to the General Assembly. Currently, allotment reductions are prohibited from being made, and places their budgets in the hands of the many, the General Assembly, where it belongs. The current structure is appropriate and eliminates the appearance of improper influence.

In hard economic times when difficult choices are being made it is imperative that decisions are made on an impartial basis and that the commitment that has been made to open honest government remains protected and free from political influence.

Thank you for your consideration.